

Peer-review report of

Lavie-Driver, N. & Linden, S.v.d. (2026). Weaponising the past: An extended SIMCA model for how social identity and collective memory shape variation in collective action responses to democratic backsliding. *advances.in/psychology*, 1, e719332. <https://doi.org/10.56296/aip00055>

Round 1

Editor Decision

Dear Authors,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript, “How social identity and collective memory shape responses to democratic backsliding,” for consideration in our special issue on *The Psychology of Pushback* (Perspective format). We have received feedback from two experts with significant expertise in this area, and we are grateful for their constructive comments. Their evaluations, in conjunction with our own editorial review, have informed our decision.

There is a consensus among the reviewers and editors regarding the notable strengths of your submission. As Reviewer 1 states, “This is a timely and highly relevant question that fits well within the scope of the Special Issue on The Psychology of Pushback. The paper is clearly written, accessible to an interdisciplinary readership, and ambitious in scope. Its central idea – that responses to democratic backsliding are filtered through social identity and collective memory – is compelling.” In a similar vein, Reviewer 2 notes, “There are many things to like about the paper. It addresses a relevant issue in political science and social psychology, connecting psychological theory with pressing global political developments. And the inclusion of diverse case studies offers some comparative insights.” We, the Editors, wholeheartedly concur with these positive assessments. We believe that the focus of your work aligns well with the theme of the Special Issue, found the manuscript to be engagingly written, and were stimulated by your insights. We see considerable promise in your work.

However, like the Reviewers, we feel that the current version of the manuscript does not yet sufficiently fulfil that promise. Both reviewers identified several limitations that require careful attention. We concur with those reservations. Many of these points will require rethinking and reframing of the work to make a more persuasive case for the novel theoretical contribution of the work and clearer evidence in support of your arguments and conclusions.

While the issues we identify are challenging, given the many admirable qualities of the current manuscript and the potential we all see in your work, we invite you to submit a revised manuscript that thoroughly addresses these issues. The reviewers devoted considerable effort to providing thoughtful feedback, and while we ask that

you respond to each of their points, we will not reiterate them here. Instead, we wish to highlight overarching issues that we and the reviewers consider critical for revision. The final determination of the suitability of your manuscript for the Special Issue will depend on how effectively you can address these issues.

First, there is a consensus that the manuscript would benefit from a more robust conceptual framework at the outset to establish greater theoretical coherence. This foundational section, preceding the case studies, should:

- Explain the rationale for selecting the key constructs for your analysis.
- Review the literature behind these constructs in greater detail, incorporating the work suggested by Reviewer 1 (we also suggest work by Seamus Power).
- Integrate these elements into a clear analytical framework that directly informs the cases that follow.
- Present a stronger and more explicit argument concerning the ways this analytical framework can advance a conceptual understanding of how social identity and collective memory shape responses to democratic backsliding.

Second, to strengthen your paper, please provide a clearer explanation of how your methodology, particularly the case study approach, will lead to a new theoretical contribution. Part of that will require a more detailed description of your research method for the current work. As Reviewer 2 notes, it is essential to outline your methodology, as many readers in psychology may be unfamiliar with the case series approach. Please articulate the epistemological foundations of this method, contrasting it with more common psychological approaches and clarifying what can and cannot be asserted regarding causal inference. In this section, you should also explain your rationale for the choice of cases. Following this, please ensure that the case studies are explicitly and consistently linked back to the new theoretical framework you have established.

As Reviewer 1 notes, the analysis of the Israeli case would be strengthened by incorporating greater nuance. We would like to emphasize two points in particular. First, your argument should acknowledge that many Ashkenazi Jews have familial, and in some cases direct, experience with the catastrophic consequences of democratic backsliding in Europe. This collective memory may instill a perception of democracy as sacred and non-negotiable. When considering this perspective, we encourage you to also explore the boundary conditions of this phenomenon. We suggest you discuss subgroups where this dynamic may differ, such as within Ashkenazic ultra-Orthodox communities. Second, it would be valuable to discuss the underexplored linkages between Case 1 and Case 2, specifically the large-scale migration of Jews from Russia and other former Soviet states to Israel. The manuscript could analyze how the voting patterns of this influential demographic, which often leans right-wing, may be shaping Israeli politics in a manner that parallels the political trajectory of their countries of origin.

Third, we recommend that you significantly expand your discussion of future directions. We recommend moving this from the conclusion to a standalone section, and we think that a title such as “Pathways for Intervention Development” would aptly capture its intended focus (more so than “Future Directions”). This section has the potential to be the most impactful component of your manuscript. To realize this potential, we ask that you present more concrete and specific ideas for interventions. Crucially, each proposed intervention must be explicitly and thoroughly linked to the new theoretical framework you establish, as well as grounded in the particulars of the case studies you analyze.

In addition to these larger points, please address the following stylistic issues: In line with APA7, please use “&” instead of “and” when referring to two authors in parentheses.

- There seems to be a word missing in this sentence: “A collective memory in which democracy plays only a marginal role likely renders democratic backsliding less of a norm violation—and thus more socially—than in societies with longer democratic traditions.” Do you mean “socially acceptable?”
- Instead of Figure 1, can you cite a news article about the specific case?
- The title proposed by one of the reviewers is too long. Please keep the current version.
- Please provide the page numbers for all direct quotes such as the one by Bermeo (2016).
- Our routine citation check indicated various issues with the in-text citations and reference list. Please thoroughly address these issues (but note that there are some false positives): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ei6THmYWIG09LkdSTW5GQSV_oY8N5MYT/view?usp=sharing
- Here, also make sure that all journal articles have DOI numbers in URL format whenever available.

In summary, we believe this manuscript holds considerable promise, but its potential has not been fully realized in its current form. We therefore invite you to submit a revised version that addresses the points outlined above. As noted earlier, the changes we are requesting are challenging and fundamental, but we would not invite a revision of the manuscript unless we believed that there was a reasonable likelihood that you could address the issues successfully. Please submit your revision by November 15. Please also include a detailed cover letter describing, point-by-point, how and where you have addressed these overarching concerns, as well as the other, specific points raised by the Reviewers. Should you require additional time, do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to receiving your revised work.

Best,

Jonas R. Kunst & John F. Dovidio

Reviewer 1

The paper explores the relationship between social identity, collective memory, and public responses to democratic backsliding, using three case studies: Russia under Putin, Israel's judicial reforms under Netanyahu, and growing disillusionment with democracy among Gen Z in Western societies. It discusses how social media, misinformation, and AI contribute to affective polarization and reshape collective memory, increasing vulnerability to authoritarian narratives. The authors propose psychological interventions such as inoculation theory and the Gateway Belief Model (GBM) as potential tools to counteract these trends.

There are many things to like about the paper. It addresses a relevant issue in political science and social psychology, connecting psychological theory with pressing global political developments. And the inclusion of diverse case studies offers some comparative insights.

However, I am overall not convinced that the paper, at least in its current form, advances the state of knowledge on these issues. I must disclose that I am not very familiar with case studies and qualitative work.

Throughout the paper, the use of terms like "shape," "demonstrate," and "establish" implies causal relationships that the methodology does not support. For example, the claim that "how social identity and collective memory shape responses to democratic backsliding" suggests stronger empirical proof than is presented. The same applies to phrases like "we demonstrate that democratic engagement is often contingent" or "However, as the next section will establish" which are too definitive given the largely interpretive methodology based on case studies. Replacing these with more cautious language such as "suggest," "argue," or "indicate" would be more appropriate and would better reflect the qualitative, associative nature of the evidence.

The paper ambitiously attempts to cover multiple complex domains—three multifaceted case studies, social media's role, misinformation, AI/LLMs, affective polarization, social identity theory, collective memory, and psychological interventions such as inoculation and GBM. This breadth is overwhelming and dilute the coherence of the argument. The paper would benefit from narrowing its focus or clearly delimiting how these elements interconnect, to avoid confusion about its core contributions.

The paper's methodology and objectives feel unclear. It is not always evident what the authors aim to "show" versus what they "propose" or "speculate." The qualitative case approach and theoretical synthesis are insightful, but the paper should explicitly acknowledge the limits of its claims and clarify that it provides plausible

interpretations rather than definitive findings. Often, it is not clear why these explanations should be favored to alternative ones.

The paper reviews very complex and multi-causal phenomena. The authors' explanations are interesting and plausible, but it is not clear the extent to which this paper actually makes some progress on either understanding these phenomena or 'solving' them. The case studies are very complex, and perhaps the authors do not have enough space to explain/address them all, and do them justice.

It is not clear why these three case studies were chosen and not others. For instance, there is a risk of selection bias in choosing cases that support the central thesis without adequately addressing opposing examples or contradictory evidence.

Many arguments, such as the impact of AI chatbots on democratic backsliding, or claims about social media, appear speculative and lack robust empirical support.

Overall, most sections would benefit from more detailed explanation or clearer articulation of theoretical frameworks and the evidence from case studies.

Reviewer 2

The manuscript "*How social identity and collective memory shape responses to democratic backsliding*" examines how processes of social identity and collective memory influence responses to democratic backsliding. Drawing on three illustrative cases – Russia under Putin, the Israeli protests judicial reform, and the growing disillusionment with democracy among Gen Z in Western societies – the authors argue that resistance or apathy toward democratic backsliding largely depends on whether democracy is perceived as advancing one's in-group interests and collective memory. The paper further highlights the role of social media and AI in amplifying affective polarization and reshaping collective memory and concludes by proposing psychological interventions such as inoculation theory and the Gateway Belief Model.

This is a timely and highly relevant question that fits well within the scope of the *Special Issue on The Psychology of Pushback*. The paper is clearly written, accessible to an interdisciplinary readership, and ambitious in scope. Its central idea – that responses to democratic backsliding are filtered through social identity and collective memory – is compelling. The case illustrations make the discussion engaging, and the inclusion of emerging developments such as AI lends topicality.

Theoretical framework and systematics

The manuscript would benefit from a deeper and more systematic engagement with the theories it draws upon. Social Identity Theory and the concept of collective memory are invoked, but not fully developed as explanatory frameworks. Their

interaction as well as different mechanisms (e.g., need for positive distinctiveness, self-esteem, efficacy beliefs) are mentioned but not systematically integrated. The result is a set of suggestive links rather than a coherent explanatory model.

This lack of systematicity also creates internal inconsistencies. For example, the introduction claims that societal responses to democratic backsliding depend on whether democracy enhances in-group *status*. Yet the status dimension is not further developed in the case analyses. Instead, the argument shifts to other mechanisms (collective efficacy, injustice appraisal, threat), without systematic integration (e.g. mentioning SIMCA-Model), leaving the initial framing underexplored. If “status” is to be presented as central, the authors should elaborate how it operates across contexts; if not, the introduction should be reframed.

Moreover, the paper raises many promising argumentative strands but does not fully integrate them into a systematic framework. This breadth sometimes results in the argument appearing fragmented, anecdotal, and lacking depth. For instance, inoculation theory – primarily researched in the context of misinformation – is extended to democratic disillusionment without sufficiently specifying mechanisms or limits of such a transfer or reflecting it in the context of collective memory and its complex relation to factual historical knowledge. Similarly, levels of analysis are blurred: at times the focus is on individuals’ reactions as group members, at other points on political leaders’ rhetoric (e.g., Putin, Netanyahu), and then on structural or technological contexts (e.g., social media, AI). Without a clearer systematics, it becomes difficult to assess how these levels interact or reinforce one another.

A stronger theoretical section that (a) integrates existing models of memory and collective action (e.g. Freel & Bilali, 2021), (b) specifies the mechanisms linking collective memory and social identity and their interaction in shaping collective behavior, and (c) clearly delineates the scope and boundaries of the approach, would considerably strengthen the manuscript.

Methodological approach, scope, and focus

I am unfamiliar with the paper’s format and its methodological positioning. The examples are referred to as case studies but they are not analyzed with systematic criteria for selection or comparison. Instead, the manuscript reads as a set of illustrative cases without a fully elaborated theoretical backbone.

The manuscript addresses a wide range of themes – social identity, collective memory, affective polarization, social media, AI, inoculation theory. While breadth can be engaging, in this case it risks obscuring the central contribution. Focusing more tightly on the interplay between social identity and collective memory, while treating other themes as forward-looking implications, would help sharpen the argument.

The comparability of the cases also raises questions. Russia and Israel are analyzed at the national level, while Gen Z is presented as a generational cohort across multiple countries. This shift in level of analysis weakens the comparative logic. Either a stronger justification for this diversity is needed, or the structure should be revised.

Moreover, the title is also overly broad for this approach. A more precise title (e.g., *“How social identity and collective memory shape responses to democratic backsliding: Illustrative insights from Russia, Israel, and Western Gen Z”*) would situate the contribution more clearly.

Case illustrations and evidence

The three cases are topical, but the analyses in part simplify highly complex realities:

- **Israel:** The analysis highlights the memory of secular Ashkenazi elites as historically dominant, but it omits one of the most central collective memories shaping Israeli political identity: the Holocaust. This memory is not only foundational for Jewish-Israeli identity but has also been shown to directly inform political attitudes toward democracy, vigilance against authoritarian threats, and willingness to mobilize, as the Nazi Regime came to power in a democratic system (e.g., Klar, 2016; Klar et al., 2013; Vollhardt & Twali, 2019; recent empirical work of Halabi et al. on collective action against the judicial reform in Israel based on collective memory). At the same time, Holocaust memory is politically instrumentalized by leaders (including Netanyahu) to frame external threats and legitimize policies (Hadar et al., 2021; Liu, 2024). This dual role of the same memory in the same socio-political and historical setting – motivating protest or support for the government and its changes in democracy – is crucial but absent from the manuscript. Regarding Arab Israelis, several different explanatory levels (efficacy beliefs, repression risks, collective memory) are collapsed together without a clear systematics.
- **Gen Z (p. 9):** It remains unclear whether “Gen Z” is theorized as a social identity or merely a demographic category. There is also work looking more nuanced and critical at the youth apathy hypothesis, which could add explanatory value to the argumentation (e.g., Grassi et al., 2023). Moreover, social media and AI are presented as central in the abstract but treated only peripherally in the text.

A key limitation is the lack of empirical foundation. Although the cases are labeled as “case studies,” they are rarely based on systematic data collection or qualitative and quantitative empirical findings. Instead, the argument often relies on selective survey data, quotes and secondary sources, which makes the empirical grounding relatively thin, leaving the reader at some places with the impression that claims rest on anecdotal or partial evidence. Explicitly reflecting on its theoretical approach while reflecting these limitations and implications for further studies would not weaken the paper; on the contrary, it would increase its credibility. Moreover, integrating previous (empirical) literature on collective memory in the respective contexts would also situate the paper more firmly in the socio-political and historical landscape (e.g. Khazanov, 2013 for Russia; Hammack, 2010; Vollhardt et al., 2024; Klar, 2013; Yadgar, 2022, for Israelis and Palestinians).

Conclusion

In sum, this manuscript addresses an important and timely question and makes a promising attempt to connect social identity and collective memory to democratic backsliding. Its clarity, ambition, and interdisciplinary orientation are commendable.

At the same time, the paper raises many valuable strands but does not sufficiently integrate them into a coherent systematics, which leaves parts of the argument anecdotal and fragmented. It requires substantial revision: a sharper and more systematic theoretical framework, clearer methodological positioning, greater caution in transferring concepts across domains, a more nuanced treatment of the illustrative cases and its comparability, and explicit reflection on its approach and empirical limitations.

I therefore recommend **Major Revision**. The central idea is highly relevant, but the manuscript requires significant refinement in scope, focus, theoretical depth, and methodological positioning to fully realize its potential and answer the research question.

Literature:

Freel, S. H., & Bilali, R. (2022). Putting the past into action: How historical narratives shape participation in collective action. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 52(1), 204–222. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2813>

Fernández Guzmán Grassi E, Portos M, Felicetti A. Young People's Attitudes towards Democracy and Political Participation: Evidence from a Cross-European Study. *Government and Opposition*. 2024;59(2):582-604. doi:10.1017/gov.2023.16

Hammack, P. L. (2010). The cultural psychology of Palestinian youth: A narrative approach. *Culture & Psychology*, 16(4), 507-537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X10380159> (Original work published 2010)

Khazanov, A. M. (2013). Whom to mourn and whom to forget?(Re) constructing collective memory in contemporary Russia. In *Perpetrators, Accomplices and Victims in Twentieth-Century Politics* (pp. 132-149). Routledge.

Klar, Y. (2016). Four moral obligations in the aftermath of historical ingroup victimization. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 11, 54-58.

Klar, Y., Schori-Eyal, N., & Klar, Y. (2013). The “Never Again” state of Israel: The emergence of the Holocaust as a core feature of Israeli identity and its four incongruent voices. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(1), 125-143.

Vollhardt, J. R., Konushevci, T., Macedonci, A., & Lee, H. (2024). Never again: Lessons of genocide in survivor testimonies from the Holocaust, Nanjing massacre and Rwandan genocide. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 54(7), 1577-1592.

Yadgar, Y. (2022). Nostalgia and political analysis: A perspective from the Israeli case. *Politics*, 45(1), 3-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02633957221098028>

Round 2

Editor Decision

Dear Authors,

Thank you for submitting your revised manuscript, “How social identity and collective memory shape responses to democratic backsliding: Insights from Russia, Israel, and the United States,” for consideration in our special issue on *The Psychology of Pushback*. We have now received comments from two Reviewers who also commented on your original submission. We are grateful for the time and effort both Reviewers have devoted to your work.

Both Reviewers recognized substantial improvements in the revised manuscript. Reviewer 2 writes that the “authors have substantially improved the manuscript and have done a thorough job addressing my comments.” Reviewer 1 states, “The paper is clearly improved in coherence, structure, and the authors have made a commendable effort to develop a more systematic conceptual framework, expand the theoretical grounding, and justify their methodological approach.” However, Reviewer 1, while acknowledging and appreciating the improvements, recommends additional revision and offers extensive feedback. We agree that the manuscript is substantially stronger. Your manuscript has made a significant leap forward. We recognized considerable promise in the original version of your manuscript, and we are now even more convinced about the appropriateness of your work for the Special Issue. Given your impressive responsiveness to the initial round of comments, we believe that you will be able to address these remaining issues. We are committed to working with you to ensure this research reaches its full potential.

Reviewer 1 offers extensive and insightful comments constructively highlighting areas for improvement. We will not repeat every point here but ask that you address each one in your revision. We will, however, highlight several key issues. For instance, Reviewer 1 requests further conceptual clarity regarding how relative deprivation is utilized. We also agree with Reviewer 1 that the breadth of your focus fluctuates somewhat when guiding readers through your cases. It would be beneficial to maintain a clear focus on explaining collective action against democratic backsliding (or, in some instances, supporting it, as you note this is clearly relevant as well) as your primary endpoint. As Reviewer 1 states, this also maintains the alignment with the SIMCA, which you seek to extend.

Relatedly, Reviewer 1 asks you to further articulate the contribution of your paper, which, as you note, has evolved from a commentary or perspective paper to a theory-proposing paper. Please communicate the primary goal more clearly in both the main text and the abstract. For instance, the Introduction now states, “The assumption that democracy is worth defending is not universal. Instead, we will argue, it is shaped by whether a group’s identity and recollection of historical group experiences promotes pro-democracy attitudes. This in turn impacts their willingness to engage in collective resistance against democratic backsliding, in line with the social-identity model of collective action (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008). To

attempt to illustrate this, the paper presents three cross-cultural case studies from Russia, Israel and the United States.” We recommend that you immediately follow these points with an explicit statement about what the intended new theoretical contribution of your work is and then use that as a touchpoint across your manuscript. We suggest that you make this statement in a way that centers your work as the proposal of a new, testable extended model. Of course, the stated intended contribution of your work needs to align with the conceptual model you subsequently present in the Figure. Given the broader and more comprehensive scope of your work, we also suggest a bolder title, such as “Weaponizing the past: How social identity and collective memory shape responses to democratic backsliding.”

We, like the Reviewers, applaud how you have elaborated on your case-based methodology. While you have made significant progress in tempering claims that may not be warranted based on this analysis, Reviewer 1 asks for an even clearer distinction between “what the authors are proposing as theoretically plausible interpretations and what the cases can meaningfully support in the absence of systematic data.” Maybe some restructuring within the cases would be meaningful, starting with the most certain assessments.

In addition to these and other points raised by the first Reviewer, please also attend to the following issues and suggestions that we noted while reading your revised paper.

PRESENTATION OF MODEL

The figure of your overarching model is very helpful. However, some improvements are needed:

1. The placement of certain arrows and text makes it difficult to discern whether the new factors you have added to the SIMCA are moderators, have main influences on its components, or both. Please clarify this through adjustments to the figure and in the main text. To make the relevant new theoretical contributions more evident to readers, you might considering different style lines/arrows to identify what elements of the figure are borrowed directly from SIMCA and which are additional processes that you are proposing (see the related comment on coloring later).
2. Please ensure that the current red box is visibly the final component in the sequence (it is currently placed next to the two collective memory boxes, potentially falsely suggesting that these occur simultaneously).
3. Reviewer 1 also made the valuable point that there should be reciprocal paths between social identity and collective memory.

4. Please simplify the coloring. Instead of using one color per construct, you could use different colors to distinguish between the standard SIMCA and the components that extend it.
5. Importantly, to clearly tie the cases to the model, please provide three additional figures (one per case) that fit the model to each specific context (i.e., populating each box with content relevant to that case). This will help exemplify the extended model for each case. By moving through the factors in these applied models consecutively in the main text, you ensure a coherent and streamlined focus and presentation across cases, which Reviewer 1 asked for.
6. In the main conceptual model (i.e., the first model presented; not the three applied variants suggested above), it would also be beneficial to visualize the emerging technological threats you mention later. This will help tie your comprehensive paper together more effectively.
7. Please ensure all figures are presented as SVGs file embedded directly in the document to ensure high resolution.

CASE SELECTION

Your justification of the case selection is much clearer now. It would further be helpful to draw on recent democratic developments as indexed by benchmarks such as V-Dem or the Democracy Index. The countries may be comparable in some aspects (perhaps recent decline) but also differ in absolute terms (e.g., two flawed democracies; one authoritarian regime). This could help you further explain how the selection ensures both diversity and comparability between the cases. Also, as you walk readers through and/or summarize each of the case studies, please explicitly note the relationship of the elements you highlight in your case study to the stated overriding objective of the current work and your conceptual model. This will help readers better discern your chain of evidence for the model you propose.

LINGUISTIC IMPROVEMENTS

The paper generally reads well but requires further polishing. We list a few issues below, but we ask you to carefully proofread the manuscript to rule out additional errors.

- There is a typo in the abstract (“proposes” should be plural).
- Not a typo, but for stylistic reasons, please replace “e.g.” in the main text with “for instance” or similar phrases. Inside parentheses, “e.g.” and “i.e.” are appropriate, but please ensure a comma follows them, which currently is not the case.
- Unless referring to statistics, write out numbers under 12 (e.g., you currently write “...10 years prior...”).

- There are many instances of the vague pronoun “this” in the text. Please reduce these instances by about 90% by explicitly stating what “this” refers to (e.g., “This process” etc.).
- For readability, please break the following sentence into two: “Because randomisation is not feasible within a case study design (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), our “diverse” case-studies leverage a theory-driven approach where we use a theoretical framework within which to critically examine cases which were selected because of their diversity in representing the variable of interest (i.e. democratic backsliding).”
- There seems to be a closing em dash missing here: “Conversely, other groups fearing that the Trump administration will increase their relative deprivation – e.g. liberal women have protested against Trump (Pressman et al., 2022).”
- There is an extra parenthesis in “((Yakir, 2023)” and here: “(Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Hadar et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024)).”
- Please rephrase the following sentence, as you likely did not intend to suggest that the outgroup (Arabs) will feel deprived *due to* democracy according to Kahane: “For Kahane, democracy would be the eventual source of relative deprivation to an outgroup, and authoritarianism was necessary to stop it.”
- Please ensure there is a space after every “p.” and before the corresponding page number.
- A full stop is missing here: “They promote a regress narrative in which the Phillipines has since declined, and has become increasingly relatively deprived compared to nations such as South Korea”
- Another missing full stop: “(e.g Orhan, 2022)”.
- Please change “benefits” to “capabilities” or a similar term in this sentence: “Considering these benefits, the future may see increasing cases of AI technologies being manipulated to exploit identity for undemocratic purposes.”
- Please revise the expression: “potentially potent.”
- Double punctuation here: “(e.g. Roozenbeek et al., 2022; van der Linden et al., 2022)..”
- Please change “America” to “the U.S.” (or “United States”—please ensure consistency throughout) in this sentence: “Specifically, the cases of Russia, Israel, and America have been explored as examples of how social identity and collective memory shape different variations of engagement with democracy.”
- Please provide at least five keywords in total. “Authoritarianism” is a clear candidate.

CONNECTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

As the Reviewers highlighted in the previous round, your paper does a very good job of situating itself within the theme of the special issue. To create cohesion between papers, especially when they are thematically related, we encourage authors to consider whether other papers in the special issue may support or be informative to their arguments. For instance, these two papers may be useful for the U.S. case and generational shifts, and explain why the three described leaders, despite scandal after scandal, remain popular among their followers.

<https://advances.in/psychology/10.56296/aip00042/>

<https://advances.in/psychology/10.56296/aip00040/>

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT AND INTERVENTIONS

Thank you for adding the “Pathways for Future Research and Intervention Development” section, which has elevated the paper considerably. While it is already rich, we agree with Reviewer 1 that it would be beneficial to develop it a step further by specifying a series of testable hypotheses. These could then be summarized in a table. Here, it would be important to generate hypotheses for main effects as well as interactions that can be tested experimentally or through other designs. In this section, please also refer back to how these pathways relate to the original objective of the current work and how they promise to extend it.

Regarding interventions, it would be beneficial to include a table that maps different possible interventions to the specific factors in your model that they target.

OTHER MINOR ISSUES

- A general question we encountered is whether individuals consciously trade freedoms for rectifying perceived injustice, or whether they do not perceive authoritarianism for what it is. Perhaps you could spell out the assumed processes.
- We do not believe the DeepSeek prompting example benefits the paper, as it remains anecdotal even if likely reproducible. Please remove it.
- When discussing AI risks, please also review and implement new research on chatbots’ sycophantic tendencies, which may pick up on and support anti-authoritarian tendencies and validate perceived injustices via collective narratives among users.
- You may want to add to the LLM paragraphs that these models are increasingly replacing democratic platforms such as Wikipedia that have long served as sources of historical truth.

CITATION & REFERENCES CHECK

There are still many inconsistencies in your citations and references, including typos in author names, missing references that are cited in text, references in your list that are not cited, incorrect use of “and” instead of “&” in parentheses (an issue we highlighted in the previous round), etc. Please use our free tool at <https://apa.advances.in> to check your manuscript. Please thoroughly address all issues and validate that they are resolved by re-uploading your manuscript in the app. Also, please make use of its DOI check function to verify the DOI links. Please note that the app is probabilistic and some false positives may occur, which you can ignore.

In summary, we believe your manuscript has shown strong development. Addressing the remaining issues is likely to move the paper close to the level we envision for the special issue, but this will depend on how thoroughly you engage with them. We therefore invite you to submit your revision by January 30. As before, please also include a detailed cover letter describing, point-by-point, how and where you have addressed the identified issues. Should you require additional time, do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to receiving your revised work.

Best,

Jonas R. Kunst & John F. Dovidio

Reviewer 1

The authors have substantially improved the manuscript and have done a thorough job addressing my comments. The few points that remain unaddressed concern methodological aspects, which the authors cannot feasibly modify and on which I have limited expertise. Overall, I think that the manuscript is ready for publication.

Reviewer 2

This revised manuscript clearly shows how much effort the authors have invested. The authors have undertaken a substantial revision of their manuscript, and many of the previously raised concerns have been carefully addressed. The paper is clearly improved in coherence, structure, and the authors have made a commendable effort to develop a more systematic conceptual framework, expand the theoretical grounding, and justify their methodological approach.

I fully agree with the authors that political psychology in general benefits from and requires broader interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and methodological perspectives, particularly when exploring complex links between historical, sociopolitical and psychological dynamics such as collective action against democratic backsliding. Because my own expertise lies mainly in quantitative empirical psychology, I am less familiar with hybrid formats that blend theoretical commentary, comparative synthesis and case-study illustration. I recognize that such formats follow different criteria from quantitative-empirical articles, but I also suspect that many

psychological readers will share my need for clearer conceptual precision and methodological systematic. It is therefore important to note where the manuscript still needs conceptual and structural refinement to meet the expectations of a psychological audience. The new conceptual framework improves the coherence of the paper, yet the manuscript still struggles to crystallise its contribution in a way that is both theoretically coherent and methodologically grounded. Four points merit particular attention:

Conceptual anchoring and clarity:

- The revised conceptual framework improves coherence and structure, yet the manuscript still struggles to crystalize a distinctive theoretical contribution. The authors propose that different groups within a society interpret and respond to democratic erosion through distinct collective memories, and that democratic backsliding can be experienced as a status threat or injustice. This is an engaging line of thought, but the manuscript does not systematically unpack how these perceptions, together with social identity dynamics, translate into collective action.
- The integration of the SIMCA model and collective memory remains underdeveloped in the case studies. The conceptual figure reduces the interactions to linear pathways even though the text stresses reciprocal, multi-level influences, and it does not fully capture how memory shapes identity processes or, in turn, how social identity shapes remembering, engagement and interpretation of historical trajectories.
- The recurring reference to “relative deprivation” is ambiguous: at times it appears to describe group-comparative deprivation, at others a more diffuse sense of collective anxiety or status loss. Clarifying what “relative” refers to - which other groups, which dimensions, grounded in which historical narratives - and specifying its link to injustice-appraisal would sharpen this very interesting argument considerably (see Smith et al., 2012).

Focus and Outcome:

- The paper aims to illuminate collective action against democratic backsliding. However, the distinction between explaining democratic backsliding in a system itself, affective polarization (e.g. case 3), attitudes towards democracy and explaining collective action against backsliding is not always tightly maintained. These are distinct phenomena supported by partly overlapping but not interchangeable mechanisms and levels. In several places (e.g. summary and conclusion) the manuscript shifts between the constructs in a way that makes the reader uncertain about the primary explanatory target. Given the already wide scope of the manuscript, it would strengthen the argument considerably to focus more tightly and precisely on *collective action against* democratic backsliding, which is where the title, theoretical framework and SIMCA most directly applies.

Methodological Positioning

- A further challenge that limits the manuscript's contribution is that its scholarly identity remains insufficiently defined. Clarifying whether the paper intends to propose a new testable theoretical model, illustrate a perspective through case material, or offer commentary would greatly enhance coherence and credibility and help the authors more clearly articulate the added value of their approach relative to existing psychological research (see below)
- The methodological positioning of the manuscript has improved, yet remains insufficiently rigorous from the perspective of psychological science. While the authors now provide a definition of the case study method and articulate its value for theory development, the implementation of this method is not yet systematic. The criteria for interpreting evidence remain broad and appear applied inconsistently. A clearer distinction is needed between what the authors are proposing as theoretically plausible interpretations and what the cases can meaningfully support in the absence of systematic data.
- Political psychology is a diverse methodological field that routinely uses not only randomized experiments (p. 4). The manuscript would therefore benefit from clarifying the *distinctive added value* of its methodological approach *beyond* other established methods, especially given that other studies already use more systematic approaches, including systematic literature reviews, survey data, and quantitative and qualitative computational content analysis to examine the interplay of collective memory and social identity, including in authoritarian contexts.

Argumentation:

- Although the manuscript is now more structured, the narrative flow remains at times difficult to follow and the manuscript still struggles to establish a fully coherent argumentative structure. Sections introduce multiple new ideas without fully integrating them with prior arguments. This particularly affects the transition from theoretical framework to the case studies, the internal logic within each case study, the integration of the case studies with the subsequent “future risks” section on AI and social media, and the link between mechanisms and interventions. New ideas and mechanisms appear frequently, sometimes without being fully integrated into the underlying theoretical logic. The summary and conclusion ranges from status threat to elite rhetoric and AI without firmly tying these threads back to a coherent theoretical core. The result is that the central contribution becomes difficult to identify, and the narrative occasionally feels fragmented. While the added summary sections improve the readability and transitions between topics, the underlying conceptual cohesion is still not fully achieved.
- This is especially challenging when the manuscript moves from descriptive illustration to prescriptive intervention, as the causal mechanisms referred to in the proposed interventions have not yet been empirically tested. Before outlining interventions at this stage, it would be helpful to summarize the theoretical core contribution and proposed mechanisms, allowing specific hypotheses for future research and specify what evidence is needed to

support or refute them, particularly regarding collective memory's effects on efficacy, injustice perceptions, or status threat with respect to social identity.

- One of the most promising aspects of the manuscript is precisely its potential to articulate such a research agenda. The field would benefit from knowing not only how history, identity, and memory might matter, but also what specific hypotheses should be tested, what kinds of data could adjudicate between competing explanations, and how future empirical work, or cross-cultural, methodological or interdisciplinary lenses could expand prior work (as done on p. 34, however conflated with attitudes to democracy as an outcome) —> This could also provide a powerful backbone to the outlined interventions, where the current links (e.g. referring inoculation against misinformation to collective memory) and outcomes (attitude towards democracy vs. collective action) are not yet systematically integrated and coherently tied back to the underlying mechanisms and specified assumptions.
- The manuscript's scope remains wide, incorporating social identity, collective memory, affective polarization, status threat, elite rhetoric, social media dynamics, artificial intelligence, misinformation, inoculation theory, and the Gateway Belief Model. Each of these topics is rich, but the manuscript would benefit from tying these threads back to a coherent theoretical core. One practical step that could improve readability would be to use more descriptive section headings throughout the manuscript. For example, a subheading titled simply "AI" does not tell the reader what aspect of artificial intelligence is under discussion. In general, tightening the narrative and making explicit how each section contributes to the central claim would greatly enhance coherence.

In sum, this revised manuscript makes clear progress and contains several intellectually stimulating ideas. However, the central theoretical contribution is not yet fully articulated, the methodological rationale is still ambiguous. With further refinement in these areas, the manuscript could serve as a strong foundation for future empirical work and, eventually, inform interventions at the intersection of social identity, collective memory and democratic resilience.

Round 3

Editor Decision

Dear Authors,

Thank you for submitting your revised manuscript, "Weaponising the Past: An Extended SIMCA Model for How Social Identity and Collective Memory Shape Variation in Collective Action Responses to Democratic Backsliding," for further consideration in our special issue on *The Psychology of Pushback*. Your letter describing the changes you made greatly facilitated my review. I appreciate your patience and your responsiveness to the issues raised in the last round. I did not feel the need to seek additional outside review. Overall, I believe that changes you made substantially improved the manuscript and that we are very close to accepting the paper. While multiple rounds of revision can be exhausting, this final polish will

ensure your extended social identity model of collective action makes the strongest possible impact upon publication. It is stimulating work, adopting the case study approach to extend existing theory to offer new insight into the effects of collective memory of democratic history. It should attract considerable interest in the field.

While I acknowledge the significant improvements, I am requesting one more – presumably last – set of mostly minor changes. These recommended changes mainly involve further clarifying aspects of the manuscript, including the new sections that you added. I believe that these revisions will further strengthen what I see as strong and relevant work for the special issue. Because this special issue will attract readers from various disciplines, these minor clarifications to concepts like relative deprivation and affective polarization will maximize the reach and citation potential of your work.

Below I list the specific changes I am requesting, mainly in the order in which they appear in the manuscript. To facilitate your revision, I sometimes offer concrete suggestions. However, if you feel you can address the issue in another way that is more effective, feel free to do so. Please also see the attached document (link in email), with suggestions for targeted stylistic and linguistic edits to facilitate your revision.

p. 4: In the paragraph at the top of this page, you mention the SIMCA model and that your work “advances a theoretical adaptation of SIMCA.” I request that you add a brief paragraph following this paragraph (and before the paragraph that begins, “As evidence for the model”) that provides readers with the most relevant aspects of the SIMCA model. This will be essential information for readers unfamiliar with the model and a valuable reminder and orientation for readers who do know the model. Some of the information from page 8 may be moved here. Moreover, in this explanation, please (a) briefly explain why you chose this model as the basis for the current work, (b) define social identity with some additional emphasis on theoretical aspects that you will rely on later (e.g., on p. 16, “the redefining of criteria on which intergroup comparisons are made”), (c) identify key elements of the model – particularly those that you will highlight in gray in Figures 2-4, and (d) describe briefly and in broad strokes how the nature of the changes you will propose “advances a theoretical adaptation of SIMCA” (e.g., tailoring the model to the specific context of responses to democratic backsliding; contextualizing processes of the model historically). This new paragraph should foreshadow your more detailed discussions of related issues, such as how social identities may represent “a democratic identity – for instance, grounded in collective memories of the dangers of historic undemocratic groups” and how “the strength of identities such as religion may at times overshadow democracy” (see p. 11 of the manuscript). Also, this new paragraph should prepare readers for Figure 1 (which appears on p. 12).

p. 6: When you first refer to specific political/historical events, please add a sentence or two concretely describing them. This will help readers who are less knowledgeable understand what you are referring to, including those who may read your work many years from now. One example is your reference on page 6 to the collective memory in Russia of the 1990s. As you elaborate on this, please specify

what particular aspect or consequence of the fall of the Soviet Union is particularly relevant. Another example is the statement that “affective polarisation helped fuel undemocratic collective action on January 6th 2021,” which appears on p. 7. You describe the event in more detail later (e.g., pp. 37-38 for the January 6th incident) which is fine, but a bit more information when you first mention these will help readers comprehend the flow of your work better. Please review your manuscript for other such important incidents that would benefit from more detailed description.

p. 9: When you introduce key theories or concepts, please briefly define them. An example of this is “relative deprivation,” which is introduced on p. 9. Given the topic and approach of your manuscript, I expect your work to attract the interest of readers with a range of backgrounds. Providing these additional details will make it more accessible to them.

Regarding the very definition of relative deprivation, the current phrasing on pp. 8-9 separates group relative deprivation from the perception of unfairness. However, foundational literature (including the papers you cite) defines group relative deprivation as inherently containing the appraisal that a disadvantage is unjust or undeserved. Merely perceiving that the ingroup is worse off is better described as perceived inequality or relative disadvantage. I recommend revising the opening sentence to reflect that group relative deprivation per definition already encompasses this feeling of undeservedness. The subsequent sentences could then be reframed to explain that objective inequality does not always lead to group relative deprivation, using system justification theory to explain why disadvantaged groups might sometimes view their lower status as fair rather than unjustly depriving. This change then also means that your throughout, in text and figures, should drop the “undeserving” adjective in front of “relative deprivation.”

pp. 13, 17, 24, 27, 32, and 39: I appreciate your detailed explanation of the processes illustrated in each of the Figures. These are valuable additions to the manuscript. However, I request, for both substantive (the critical importance to the arguments you are presenting) and stylistic (very long break in the text caused by such long notes) reasons that you move this information into the main text. This can be done quite easily. The word “Note” can be removed, and the italics can be removed, and a brief caption can be added to each Figure.

p. 29: in the case study in Israel, can you clarify your definition of the groups you are referring to? Are these Arab Israelis and Jewish Israelis? For instance, on p. 27, you refer to “religious Israelis.” Do you mean religious Jewish Israelis or religious people in Israel (including, for example Muslim or Druze people) generally?

Some cosmetic issues (Several are already corrected in the attached document, but please check):

- p. 4: minor stylistic point: Please do not use the ellipsis (“...”) at the beginning or end of a quotation.

- p. 4: Another minor stylistic comment: The last paragraph on p. 4 is very long. Please begin a new paragraph, beginning with “Beyond the practical advantage.”

- p. 7: please spell out the term “large language models” where you introduce that term into the text here, as we suggested in the attached document.
- p. 10: Minor point: Please correct the typo: “(Druckman (2024))”
- p. 11 (and elsewhere): Minor point: The phrase “on the other hand” should be preceded by a statement beginning “On the one hand.” Alternatively, you can use phrases like “By contrast” or “however” in place of “on the other hand.”
- p. 31: Minor point: Please break the long paragraph into smaller ones. A potential place to begin a new paragraph is with the sentence that starts, “Kahane also cast democracy.” Please review the manuscript for other places where very long paragraphs can be broken into shorter ones (e.g., on p. 34 beginning a new paragraph at “While liberals may sympathise.”)
- p. 58: Minor point: Do you intend the sentence that begins “Ultimately” to be a continuation of the previous paragraph or a new paragraph? Since it is a single sentence, I recommend that it become the last sentence of the previous paragraph.

We are hoping to close the special issue in the near future. Given that the changes I am requesting are generally straightforward, I would like to receive the next version within 3 weeks. If you anticipate difficulty meeting that deadline, please suggest a more comfortable timeline. Also, if you have any questions about the recommended changes, please do not hesitate to contact us for clarification.

Thank you for your continued interest in publishing your manuscript in the special issue and for your cooperativeness throughout the review process. I know another round of edits requires a bit more stamina, but it is truly the final step to get this excellent paper over the finish line. I will personally make the final decision swiftly upon resubmission. I look forward to seeing the next and likely final version of the manuscript soon.

Sincerely

John F. Dovidio

No reviewer comments for this round yet.

Round 4

Editor Decision

Dear Neil and Sander,

Thank you for your prompt and thorough response to the most recent request for revision of your manuscript, “Weaponising the Past: An Extended SIMCA Model for How Social Identity and Collective Memory Shape Variation in Collective Action Responses to Democratic Backsliding,” for the special issue on *The Psychology of Pushback*. I am pleased to formally accept the manuscript for publication. Congratulations!

Again, I am grateful for your submitting this manuscript to the journal, and I have greatly appreciated your cooperation throughout the review process. Your work is

ambitious in scope, offers new integrative insights, and should attract a diverse readership. It is a valuable contribution to the special issue. I am very pleased with how the manuscript evolved across the review process, and I hope you feel the same.

The manuscript is moving forward into the publication queue, and we will contact you if we need additional material from you as the process proceeds. Thank you again for such a strong contribution to the special issue.

Sincerely.

John F. Dovidio

Special Issue Co-Editor